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Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report, submitted in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2017/10, highlights the situation of Palestinian women for the period from 1 October 2016 to 30 September 2017, and provides an overview of the assistance provided by the entities of the United Nations system with regard to education and training; health; economic empowerment and livelihoods; the rule of law and violence against women; power and decision-making; and institutional development. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

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** The submission of the report was delayed in order to complete consultations among all relevant offices.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2017/10 on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the Economic and Social Council expressed deep concern about the grave situation of Palestinian women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, resulting from the severe impact of the ongoing Israeli occupation and all of its manifestations. The Council requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation, assist Palestinian women by all available means, including those laid out by the Secretary-General in his previous report on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (E/CN.6/2017/6), and submit a report to the Commission on the Status of Women at its sixty-second session on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution. The present report covers the period from 1 October 2016 to 30 September 2017 and reviews the situation of Palestinian women on the basis of information from the United Nations entities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

2. Unless otherwise indicated, the report is based on contributions and information submitted by entities of the United Nations system that provide assistance to Palestinian women. It includes contributions from the following United Nations entities: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and its Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). It also reflects information provided by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The report builds on previous annual reports on this topic and complements other reports on the living and socioeconomic conditions of the Palestinian people (see A/72/87-E/2017/67, A/72/368-S/2017/741, A/72/90-E/2017/71 and A/72/13).

II. Situation of Palestinian women

3. This section highlights political developments during the reporting period. The volatile political, socioeconomic and humanitarian situation described below has a profound impact on all Palestinians. Analysis and an understanding of the gender-specific aspects of the situation are essential for effective responses to security, development and humanitarian needs. As further detailed in section III below, the impact of the crisis on the everyday lives and the future of women, young women and girls is immense and compounded by prevailing discrimination in law and in practice.

4. During the reporting period, the international community continued efforts to preserve the possibility of a two-State solution and promote an enabling environment for final status negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. On 23 December 2016, the Security Council adopted its resolution 2334 (2016), in which the Council reaffirmed that the establishment of settlements by Israel in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity, constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and remains a major obstacle to the

achievement of the two-State solution. The Council reiterated concerns regarding the continued construction and expansion of settlements, violence against civilians, including acts of terror, and acts of provocation and destruction. The Council also underlined that it will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations.

5. On 15 January 2017, at a conference hosted by France, participants from 70 countries reaffirmed their commitment to a negotiated two-State solution as the only way to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive resolution of the conflict and enduring peace (see S/2017/50). Participants expressed their readiness to contribute to arrangements to ensure the sustainability of a negotiated peace agreement. During the reporting period, and as detailed in the report of the Secretary-General on a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine (A/72/368-S/2017/741), the Russian Federation, Arab leaders under the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative and the United States of America undertook efforts to restart negotiations and advance peace. For the first time in 2017, the Middle East Quartet convened in Jerusalem, on 13 July, at the envoy level to discuss efforts to advance peace in the Middle East as well as the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza. The parties reached limited agreements and understandings covering electricity, water, communication and postal services.

6. There was an upward trend in settlement activities, and rates of demolitions of Palestinian-owned structures remained high during the reporting period. On 6 February 2017, following the order issued by the Israeli High Court of Justice for the evacuation and demolition of the illegal settlement outpost of Amona, the Knesset adopted the "regularization bill", which effectively authorizes the appropriation of privately owned Palestinian land in the West Bank.[1] The law was adopted despite objections by the Attorney General of Israel that it is unconstitutional and in violation of international law (see A/72/87-E/2017/67, para. 7). Since the beginning of the reporting period, plans for more than 12,000 housing units have been advanced, approved or tendered in Area C and in East Jerusalem, more than double the total for 2016. One such plan is for a new settlement deep inside the West Bank, which would further obstruct the establishment of a contiguous Palestinian State in any future peace agreement. Several petitions against the law are currently being considered by the Israeli High Court of Justice, and its implementation has been halted until the Court rules on its legality.

7. The reporting period was also marked by regular clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinian demonstrators in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. During April and May, protests escalated in support of a hunger strike by Palestinians imprisoned in Israel, and, in July, events in and around the Aqsa Mosque in the Old City of Jerusalem led to several weeks of widespread unrest in East Jerusalem and elsewhere in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Following a deadly attack on two Israeli police officers at one of the entrances to the Aqsa Mosque on 14 July, tensions around the holy site and in East Jerusalem quickly escalated as Palestinians and Muslim religious authorities rejected Israeli measures taken in response to the attack; Palestinian worshippers refused to enter the compound. Clashes between protesters and police after Friday prayers on 21 July resulted in the killing of three Palestinians. Later that night, a Palestinian man entered a house in the Israeli settlement of Halamish and stabbed to death three members of an Israeli family

[1] Following the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords and the 1995 interim agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the West Bank was divided into three zones, Areas A, B and C. Extensive responsibility was delegated by Israel to the Palestinian Authority in Areas A and B. Area C remained under full authority of Israel.

before he was shot and detained. At the height of the unrest, the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, announced a halt to all contact with the Israeli authorities, including for security coordination. Following regional and international mediation efforts, Israel removed all of the security measures and equipment that it had installed at the entrances to the Aqsa Mosque, and by 28 July Muslim religious leaders in East Jerusalem had called on worshippers to resume prayers inside the compound, thereby reducing tensions. Contact and security coordination between Israeli and Palestinian authorities have since been resumed.

8. During the reporting period, the ongoing Palestinian political divide continued to widen the chasm between Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, impeded efforts to achieve a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and worsened the already dire humanitarian situation for Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank. In a manifestation of this political division, Palestinians in Gaza were unable to participate in municipal elections. The elections, which were held on 13 May 2017, were limited to the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem). In Gaza, following the election by Hamas of a new leadership and the formation of an "administrative committee" in March 2017 to run governmental affairs in Gaza, the Palestinian Authority took a number of measures to stop subsidizing the de facto authorities in Gaza. This included making cuts related to salaries and allowances, stipends for former prisoners and electricity supply, as well as compelling Palestinian Authority employees in the Gaza Strip to take early retirement. For its part, Hamas arrested Fatah members, banned Fatah political activities in public and prevented Fatah senior officials from leaving Gaza. Hamas also appointed local judicial personnel and executed six alleged collaborators with Israel without seeking approval from President Abbas, as required under Palestinian law. The Palestinian Authority has consistently made three demands to Hamas aimed at resolving the current standoff: to dissolve the Administrative Committee; to allow the Government of national consensus, led by Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah, to work in Gaza; and to hold general elections. On 17 September 2017, as a result of mediation efforts by Egypt, Hamas agreed to those demands, thereby raising hopes for an end to the Palestinian divide.

9. During the reporting period, the humanitarian situation in Gaza worsened owing to several factors, including the ongoing impact of the hostilities in July and August 2014, the closure of Gaza, the internal Palestinian divide and a long-standing electricity crisis affecting 2 million people in Gaza. The impact of the hostilities in 2014 continues to shape the current political, social and humanitarian context and, three years on, an estimated 25,500 people remain internally displaced. In mid-April 2017, the sole power plant in Gaza, which provided about a third of its electricity, was forced to shut down following the failure by the Palestinian Authority and Hamas to resolve a dispute over the payment of taxes on fuel. In May, the supply was reduced by 30 per cent after the Palestinian Authority had informed the Israeli Electricity Company that it would no longer pay in full for the electricity supplied to Gaza through Israel. As a result, Gaza receives only 4 to 6 hours of electricity a day, down from 8 to 12 hours before April, which has had a particularly grave impact on the delivery of essential health, water, and sanitation services.[2] The lack of power has also had a severe impact on sewage treatment. The raw sewage being poured into the sea is polluting the coastline and constitutes an unfolding environmental disaster. As

[2] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "2017 Gaza crisis: urgent funding appeal", July 2017. Available from https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/2017-gaza-crisis-urgent-funding-appeal.

women and girls bear the majority of household responsibilities in Palestinian society, they are disproportionally affected by the current impact of the electricity crisis.

III. Assistance to Palestinian women

10. This section further outlines the gender dimensions of the situation of Palestinian women and details the United Nations efforts to respond to and deliver assistance amid complex humanitarian challenges. It provides updated information on the assistance provided by the United Nations system, in cooperation with the Government of the State of Palestine, donors and civil society, to address the specific needs and priorities of women, young women and girls in the following areas: education and training; health; economic empowerment and livelihoods; the rule of law and violence against women; power and decision-making; and institutional development. The volatile context and the constrained funding environment continue to pose operational challenges for the delivery of assistance and have an impact on the sustainability of the progress achieved.

11. Current priorities for the provision of United Nations support to the Palestinian people are outlined in a set of key documents, including the United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2018–2022 for the State of Palestine, which is aligned with the Palestinian National Policy Agenda (2017–2022), the Cross-Sectoral National Gender Strategy 2017–2022 and the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan, which outlines humanitarian needs and responses. In addition, the humanitarian community issued an emergency appeal to address the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza.

A. Education and training

12. Young women, young men, boys and girls continue to face distinct and gender-specific challenges in accessing education throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Lack of safe public spaces and routes to school for young women and girls, the risk for young men and boys of confrontations and involvement in clashes with security forces or demonstrations, and social and cultural norms within families and communities continue to have a negative impact and sometimes make safe and accessible education unavailable for young people and children. Young women and girls often have limited access to educational opportunities that are available or provided as a priority to young men and boys. Many young women and girls are often kept at home owing to a lack of safe public spaces, as well as to sociocultural norms.

13. Grave violations of children's rights continue at staggering levels. As reported by UNICEF, from October 2016 to September 2017, 4,107 incidents were documented, affecting 39,762 children. This included the killing of 19 Palestinian children (3 girls and 16 boys) and the injury of 570 children (32 Palestinian girls, 530 Palestinian boys, 1 Israeli girl and 7 Israeli boys). In addition, 283 incidents relating to access to education were documented. According to the latest data received from the Israel Prison Service on children in military detention, a total of 318 children (including 10 girls) were being held in detention at the end of June 2017. Children continue to be detained across the West Bank and East Jerusalem for security-related offences and through administrative detention (see A/72/361-S/2017/821).

14. United Nations entities continued to implement a range of initiatives to promote access for women, young women and girls to education and training and to improve

learning environments. During the academic year 2016/17, UNRWA operated 96 schools in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and 267 in Gaza, serving more than 310,000 students, of whom half (49.9 per cent) are female. In addition to basic education, UNRWA continued to offer technical and vocational education and training. During the reporting period, 578 girls in Gaza (33.6 per cent of all students) and 587 girls in the West Bank (58 per cent of all students) participated in such training. UNESCO provided training to 3,646 female students to improve their management, language, life and research skills across 10 community libraries established by the agency in the West Bank and Gaza. The Right to Higher Education Advocacy Campaign was implemented in four of those community libraries, which addressed the right of women to enrol in higher education institutions.

15. UNRWA, through its education and community mental health programmes, also supported teachers and school counsellors, along with students and their families, to provide counselling and address gender-based discrimination and the underlying causes of school drop-out rates. To address the limited access of adolescents and young people to safe public spaces, UNICEF provided vulnerable adolescents with capacity-building on core life skills through its entrepreneurial and civic engagement programmes. Young people have applied the skills gained in those youth-led initiatives, which has enabled them to voice issues of concern to them and take an active role within their communities, as agents of positive change. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and UN-Women also began the implementation of a joint programme to support women and youth leadership in post-conflict recovery through the use of digital technologies to establish safe, accessible and gender-responsive public spaces in Gaza.

16. In the West Bank, UNICEF and partners continued to address the important need for safety in public spaces by providing schoolchildren with protection to and from school in locations where the Israeli military and settlers are present. This programme benefited approximately 8,000 children (43.75 per cent of whom were girls) and 400 teachers (75 per cent of whom were women). UNDP, through its Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People, continued to provide education support to girls in Area C of the West Bank through mobile science and computer laboratory services in remote areas, which benefited 400 girls. A total of 220 girls benefited from the installation of a solar system to generate clean energy for schools and to relieve the schools of some of their operating costs.

B. Health

17. Women and girls have the right to health and the right to receive non-discriminatory health-care services that are not only accessible and affordable, but also of good quality. Significant challenges in the provision and accessibility of health-care services remain throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, leaving many Palestinians deprived of those rights. Palestinian women face major and distinct barriers to access to adequate health care. Accessing care can often result in an unmanageable financial burden, including travel costs, the direct costs of care, associated costs of childcare and loss of income, when women need to travel to facilities far from their homes.

18. The public health system in Gaza remains overstretched as a result of ever-increasing demand, frequent power cuts and a lack of financial and medical resources owing to facility closures and the internal Palestinian political divide. Palestine refugees, who make up some 70 per cent of the population in Gaza, are increasingly

unable to pay fees at the facilities of the Ministry of Health, and it is even harder to pay at private clinics. The population relies heavily on UNRWA for primary health-care services. Demand for UNRWA health-care services has also increased owing to the decline of the health-care services provided by the Ministry of Health and the chronic shortage of medicines and medical supplies at the Ministry's central pharmacy.

19. The maternal mortality ratio in the Occupied Palestinian Territory stands at 25 (20 in the West Bank and 31 in Gaza) per 100,000 live births, according to the Ministry of Health.[3] Yet, challenges still remain in maintaining the low maternal mortality rates and preventing avoidable deaths, such as: limited access to basic health-care services for women and children; limited early detection of developmental delays and disabilities in children; lack of quality of care as a result of overcrowding in hospitals; lack of adequate equipment and supplies; and the early discharge of mothers after birth.

20. Lack of mobility, travel restrictions and the denial of travel authorizations also have an impact on the ability of Palestinians to seek, afford and receive the health care that they need. During the reporting period, the acceptance rate for patients from the West Bank who had applied to the Israeli authorities for permits to exit the Occupied Palestinian Territory remained relatively stable, at 80 per cent.[4] However, there was a significant overall decline in the acceptance rates for permits to exit Gaza for health-care purposes. In September 2017, the acceptance rate was 55 per cent.[5] During the reporting period, 12,698 female patients submitted requests for travel permits to exit the Gaza Strip through the Erez checkpoint for specialized medical treatment in other Palestinian medical facilities, hospitals in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and, to a lesser extent, Israeli hospitals. Of these requests, 6,986 (55 per cent) were approved, 286 (2 per cent) were denied and 5,426 (43 per cent) received delayed responses after the time of the patients' hospital appointments. The approval rate for applications from female patients was higher than that for male patients: from January 2017 to August 2017, 57.2 per cent of applications from women were approved, compared with 49.7 per cent for men. At least 164 female patients were asked to appear for an Israeli security interrogation as a precondition for consideration of their application in 2017.

21. While all residents of the Gaza Strip are exempt from health-care service fees under the presidential decision of 26 June 2007, patients who require a medical referral outside the Strip have been affected by procedural delays since mid-May 2017, with a decline in the number of referrals and a slowing of the process of issuing financial coverage documents for Gaza by the relevant authorities in Ramallah. In August 2017, 1,297 referral documents were issued for Gaza patients. This is 40 per cent lower than the monthly average in the first quarter of 2017 (2,149) and 34 per cent lower than the corresponding month of 2016.

22. In response, the United Nations continued its efforts to improve health-care services. UNRWA remained a major provider of primary health-care services for Palestine refugees, operating 22 health centres in Gaza and 42 in the West Bank. In Gaza, between October 2016 and July 2017, 1,893,030 medical consultations were conducted for Palestinian refugees, of which 60 per cent were for women. In the West

[3] State of Palestine, Ministry of Health, "National Health Strategy 2014–2016".

[4] During the reporting period, WHO monitored and analysed women's access to health-care services through an examination of permit data, disaggregated by sex, for patients seeking access to medical facilities outside Gaza and the West Bank, in East Jerusalem and elsewhere.

[5] WHO, "Health access for referral patients from the Gaza Strip", monthly report, September 2017.

Bank, including East Jerusalem, 503,545 medical consultations were provided, of which 61 per cent were for women. UNRWA also provided medical services through its emergency mobile clinics to approximately 26,050 women residing in various localities in Area C.

23. Maternal and child health care continued to be an essential component of assistance. In Gaza, UNRWA provided assistance to 36,750 newly registered pregnant women, antenatal care to 245,436 women and postnatal care to 32,558 women. More than 98 per cent of all pregnant women paid at least four visits to an UNRWA health centre during their pregnancy. To reduce neonatal mortality and introduce safe and evidence-based practices to save lives at birth, WHO supported the introduction of the early essential newborn care package in Gaza, making the Occupied Palestinian Territory the first place in the Eastern Mediterranean region to implement the package. Some 34,100 women and newborns have benefited from these services in the hospitals of the Ministry of Health. In addition, with support from WHO, the Palestinian National Institute of Public Health implemented a maternal and child health electronic registry, a customized interactive checklist that facilitates data collection and utilization to guide evidence-based interventions to improve the quality of service. The electronic registry was implemented in 77 primary health-care clinics in five districts in the West Bank. To address the limited access to good-quality newborn care services in Area C of the West Bank, UNICEF provided the Ministry of Health with three mobile clinics that will serve 10,000 children and their caregivers. A package of essential basic health-care services, including the provision of medication for acute diseases, and maternal and child health-care services are provided to these communities on a weekly basis. UN-Women trained approximately 1,108 women from 23 localities near the Bethlehem and Hebron Governorates on sexual and reproductive health and issues relating to sexual and gender-based violence.

24. Through its Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People, UNDP continued to provide health-care services in East Jerusalem to female-headed households that lack formal health insurance. Through the Programme, 5,065 female patients were covered by the three Palestinian hospitals in East Jerusalem. UN-Women provided support to community-based organizations and women's organizations to strengthen their participation in humanitarian assistance. In Area C, some 30 women, including women with disabilities, benefited from counselling, legal and psychosocial services. In Gaza, some 50 women with disabilities received training to enhance their physical and psychological preparedness for emergencies.

C. Economic empowerment and livelihoods

25. Women, including young women, continue to face serious challenges linked to economic empowerment and insecurity. In Gaza, the electricity crisis and its effects, described above, significantly disrupt daily life and have a disproportionate impact on women and girls, who bear most of the household responsibilities in Palestinian society. The heavy care responsibilities and limited access to water and electricity reduce women's ability to engage in income-generating activities or to allocate time to their own needs.

26. There have been no improvements in the rates of food insecurity among Palestinian households since the issuance of the previous report. According to FAO, food insecurity affects 46 per cent of Palestinian households in the Gaza Strip and 17 per cent of Palestinian households in the West Bank. In the West Bank, the

prevalence of food insecurity among female-headed households is 10 percentage points higher than among male-headed households, while it is 3 percentage points higher in the Gaza Strip. When disaggregated by sex, the prevalence of food insecurity should be considered alongside the information available on the assistance received by households. The average value of the total support received by female-headed households is 30 per cent greater than that received by male-headed households.

27. The rate of labour-force participation for Palestinian women remains among the lowest in the region, at 19.1 per cent.[6] While female participation in the labour market has increased over the past few years, unemployment rates are higher among women than men. In the second quarter of 2017, the unemployment rate among women rose to a staggering 71.5 per cent in Gaza and reached 36.2 per cent in the West Bank.[7] The gender wage gap also persisted, with the average daily wage for Palestinian women reaching 83 new Israeli shekels (NIS), compared with NIS 114 for men.[8] The unemployment rate for youth aged 20–24 years continued to rise, reaching 46.3 per cent in the second quarter of 2017, with unemployment rates of 38.3 per cent among young men and 72.7 per cent among young women.[9] While Palestinian female jobseekers generally have relatively high levels of education in comparison with their male counterparts and with women in other developing countries, those qualifications, as previously reported, have not translated into higher levels of employment. Against this backdrop, United Nations entities continued to prioritize initiatives promoting women's economic empowerment, improving food security and livelihoods in their programming.

28. UN-Women, FAO and the International Trade Centre (ITC) supported the functioning of a "one-stop shop" in Ramallah as a comprehensive hub of services to improve access to economic opportunities for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) run by Palestinian women. The one-stop shop provided a range of services to women entrepreneurs and start-ups, including services linked to business development, capacity development, trade facilitation, access to capital or finance and production support. FAO continued to provide training and coaching to enhance the capacity of its two retail shops in the northern and southern West Bank, which market agricultural products from more than 15 women's cooperatives and two women's associations, with a total of almost 700 members. Moreover, FAO provided direct support to 20 women's cooperatives in successfully registering the trademarks of their products, and 15 women's cooperatives received specialized training on marketing. UN-Women provided technical assistance to 43 women-led MSMEs in the West Bank and Gaza and financial assistance to 34 women-led MSMEs. Of the 43 targeted MSMEs, 35 reported having increased their sales turnover since the beginning of the programme in 2015, by an average of 42.8 per cent.

29. Through its Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People, UNDP supported the establishment of 174 women-led MSMEs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In addition, 640 women were employed through job placement activities, 225 women received capacity development packages to support their economic

[6] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "International Women's Day 2017", press release, 7 March 2017.

[7] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Results of the labour force survey second-quarter (April–June 2017) round", press release, 7 August 2017.

[8] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "International Women's Day 2017".

[9] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Results of the labour force survey second-quarter (April–June 2017) round".

endeavours and 35 women were supported in accessing external markets related to food processing, textiles, and light industries. According to a UNDP assessment, more than 85 per cent of the women interviewed declared that the capacity development interventions had enhanced their competencies and the success of their projects. Approximately 80 per cent of the women reported an improvement in their bargaining power within the family and improved relationships in their community. Moreover, women reported positive changes in their mobility, access to the market and ability to sell products.

30. The Microfinance Department of UNRWA disbursed 1,693 loans, valued at $1,883,180, to women (44 per cent of the total number of loans), with the Women's Household Credit being the most common loan type. Most loans are for livelihood activities and to support the resilience of these women and their families. The microfinance programme is aimed at overcoming barriers related to access to financing by setting lower requirements than the formal banking system and regularly updating its product portfolio.

31. The UNRWA job creation programme employed 16,323 refugees, of whom 24.4 per cent were women. Most jobs offered by the programme require unskilled labour; however, owing to social and cultural barriers, the programme continues to face challenges in finding culturally acceptable jobs for unskilled women. Through a community outreach programme, which includes training and job placement, the UNRWA Gender Initiative is aimed at increasing opportunities for young women. During the reporting period, 817 young female graduates of the Young Women Leaders Programme [10] were provided with professional skills training and 235 benefited from a three-month work placement in the private sector or civil society organizations. Approximately 25 per cent of graduates were able to secure employment after completing the training and work placement.

32. United Nations entities continued to provide social safety nets to women in vulnerable situations. To support women's livelihoods in sustainable agriculture and enhance their resilience, FAO supported 16 women farmers in the West Bank through the establishment of rainwater collection cisterns and 12 women herders through the rehabilitation of community cisterns for livestock use, and facilitated land rehabilitation for five women farmers. UNDP provided economic assistance to 22 female-headed households awaiting family reunification in East Jerusalem. The assistance enables family members, especially women, to acquire income-generating skills while waiting for reunification. UNRWA continued to implement a social safety net programme, which benefited 2,558 female-headed households in Gaza (34 per cent of the total number of households targeted) and 2,558 female-headed households in the West Bank (34 per cent of the total number of households).

33. Through general food distribution and vouchers, WFP ensured increased food consumption and dietary diversity for 490,000 beneficiaries, of whom 242,500 were women. To raise awareness on healthful and appropriate nutritional practices, WFP conducted 24 sessions on nutrition, with training benefiting 2,953 food-insecure women and 991 food-insecure men who were beneficiaries of the WFP voucher programme in Gaza. WFP food vouchers empower beneficiaries and allow them to manage the needs of their household, as they have the freedom to choose their food commodities. Based on WFP monitoring, women make 92 per cent of decisions on the use of the voucher and the types of food commodities to redeem; by comparison, 4 per cent of decisions are made by men only and 4 per cent are joint decisions.

[10] Participants in the Young Women Leaders Programme have completed university degrees.

34. ILO continued to promote entrepreneurship education in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, while mainstreaming a gender perspective and empowering female youth and women. ILO supported cooperatives by providing training to women's business groups, paying special attention to the integration of women into existing cooperatives and the creation of new women-only cooperatives and cooperative management. In Gaza, ILO supported capacity-building and business plan development for existing cooperatives, including the Gaza Saving and Credit Cooperative, which comprises 1,470 female members and seeks to empower women through the provision of financial capital. FAO trained 60 female employees of the Ministries of Agriculture, National Economy and Health on animal health and food safety to enhance government capacity to implement sanitary and phytosanitary measures. With the support of FAO, four women also enrolled in a new programme for a master's degree in biotechnology and rural development.

D. Rule of law and violence against women

35. Structural inequalities, poverty and discrimination have a significant impact on the access of women and girls to justice and security. Despite the existence of laws condemning violence against women, the limited jurisdiction of the Palestinian authorities limits enforcement in some areas. Palestinian women experience high levels of gender-based violence, are subject, directly and indirectly, to political and social violence and have limited access to water and electricity, housing, land and property, employment opportunities, higher education and health care, including prenatal and neonatal health care.[11] Psychosocial distress levels, which were already high among the Gaza population, have worsened significantly as a result of the conflict and will continue to require specialized support, specifically for children, adolescent girls and women.

36. Efforts to meet the obligation to prevent violence against women in Area C and East Jerusalem are severely constrained by the inability of the Palestinian authorities to access the populations. The political divide between the de facto authority in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority also hinders the application of the law. Palestinian women continue to face specific challenges in accessing justice, including laws that discriminate on the basis of sex, notably with respect to inheritance, child custody and other personal status issues; women's limited knowledge of their human rights and related procedures; economic dependency; and social pressures and stigma.

37. Gender-based violence in all its forms, including sexual violence, intimate-partner violence and forced marriage, remains a major protection and health concern. In Gaza, poverty and the absence of economic opportunities contribute to violence against women.[12] Pervasive impunity for violence against women means that perpetrators of violence rarely, if ever, face legal, criminal or social penalties. Moreover, violence against women in the context of marriage is not considered a crime in civil law, and salient family law in Gaza and dominant social norms prioritize the preservation of a marriage over the rights of victims. Survey findings demonstrate

[11] UNFPA and the Culture and Free Thought Association, "Protection in the windward: conditions and rights of internally displaced girls and women during the latest Israeli military operation on the Gaza Strip", October 2014.

[12] UN-Women, "Navigating through shattered paths: NGO service providers and women survivors of gender-based violence — an assessment of GBV services in Gaza", research paper, September 2017.

the high value placed on "honour", with 47 per cent of men and 38 per cent of women believing that women and girls deserve punishment from their families when "honour" is perceived to have been breached. Thirty-five per cent of men and 22 per cent of women also indicated that "honour" killings should not be punished by law.[13] In addition, one third of men and one quarter of women surveyed believed that some violence against women can be justified, and the majority of men and women believed that women should tolerate such violence. Owing in part to such beliefs, only 0.7 per cent of survivors seek help as a result of the lack of confidential and compassionate services and fear of stigma and reprisal.[14] Efforts to address such attitudinal beliefs are needed, alongside efforts to strengthen the rule of law, legal protection and women's access to justice.

38. The joint UNDP and UN-Women programme on the rule of law supported the Government in strengthening the legal framework by improving the capacity of the justice and security institutions to mainstream a gender perspective into structures and services. A one-stop centre for women victims of violence was opened in Ramallah in 2017. The Civil Police Gender Strategy was launched in February 2017, which is the first gender strategy developed by a police force in the Arab States region. In October 2016, the number of specialized prosecutors dealing with family protection cases increased to 26, compared with 15 in the first quarter of 2014, when the first specialized prosecutors were identified. The partnership between UN-Women and the High Judicial Council was strengthened, and the Chief Justice announced the intention of the court under the Council's jurisdiction to ensure the provision of specialized expertise relating to violence against women in cases across all levels of courts. The Chief Justice also announced an increase in the number of judges working on cases of violence against women from 12 in October 2016 to 29 in May 2017. From October 2016 to April 2017, approximately 13,000 women and 1,100 girls in the West Bank received legal support, including representation, advice, mediation, awareness-raising and training.

39. During the reporting period, UNFPA and partners identified 12,606 cases of gender-based violence. Of these, more than 10,000 cases resulted in one or more types of psychosocial, health and legal assistance. The United Nations and its partners established three local referral pathways, which include coalitions of 77 providers of health, psychosocial, legal and shelter services. In addition, 17,802 women and men at the community level, in both the West Bank and Gaza, participated in awareness-raising sessions on gender-based violence.

40. In Gaza, UNICEF, along with the Ministry of Social Development and other partners, provided psychosocial support services to 4,965 children (52 per cent of whom were girls) and child protection services to 5,986 children (47 per cent of whom were girls). In addition, 27 girls and 76 women in need of psychosocial support were identified through situation monitoring and referred to appropriate services. In Gaza, 82 girls and 62 women with disabilities were identified and referred for support, while 51 older women and 14 women victims of gender-based violence were identified and referred for support through the disability and gender-based violence working groups.

[13] Shereen El Feki, Gary Barker and Brian Heilman, eds., *Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) — Middle East and North Africa (Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine)* (Cairo and Washington, D.C., UN-Women and Promundo, 2017).

[14] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Violence survey in the Palestinian Territory, 2011", March 2012.

41. UNFPA and its partners established two new safe spaces for women and girls, in compliance with the National Referral System for Women Victims of Violence, in Qalqilyah city and in the old city of Hebron in the West Bank, while continuing to support, operate and develop the active safe space in Jabaliya camp in Gaza. The implementing partners of UNFPA conducted 365 outreach sessions on protection from and prevention of gender-based violence, reaching 6,457 community members, and provided 900 dignity kits for survivors of gender-based violence.

42. UNRWA continued to operate a gender-based violence referral service system in Gaza and the West Bank, providing services for Palestine refugees. During the reporting period, 1,404 cases of gender-based violence were identified in Gaza. In the West Bank, UNRWA identified 284 cases and referred 29 cases to other service providers, including both government institutions — such as the Ministry of Health, for specialized medical care, and the Ministry of Social Development, for protection and for financial assistance — and non-governmental organizations.

E. Power-sharing and decision-making

43. While women participate in some areas of political life, they remain underrepresented in both elected and appointed decision-making positions. Women account for only 12.8 per cent of members of the Palestinian Legislative Council.[15] During the seventh conference of Fatah (the ruling political party in the West Bank), of the 19 members elected to the Fatah central council, only one was a woman. In the current Government, women hold only two ministerial positions: the Minister of Tourism and the Minister of Women's Affairs. Similarly, the most recent available data, from 2015, show that women accounted for only 5.8 per cent of Palestinian ambassadors, 17.2 per cent of judges, 16.7 per cent of prosecutors and 22.5 per cent of lawyers. Although women hold approximately 42.6 per cent of public sector positions, they tend to be towards the lower end of the decision-making hierarchy. For example, women held only 11.7 per cent of positions at the director general level.[16]

44. United Nations entities sought to enhance women's political participation and representation across these positions through several initiatives. UN-Women continued to provide technical assistance to 20 female local council members in the West Bank, who, in turn, through their engagement with local communities and community leaders, supported the development and implementation of nine women-led community-based initiatives. The initiatives were focused on voicing women's needs within the local community to encourage inclusive and gender-responsive decision-making in the local council. UNDP supported women in building their own awareness of rights in the context of the local elections in Tubas and Qalqilyah Governorates in the West Bank. This initiative reached more than 800 women, who were encouraged to participate actively in decision-making. As a result, two women's forums were established to facilitate increased networking and coordination among women and to build their capacity to advocate for their rights. WFP continued to promote and support women's active participation in the local committees that assist in the implementation of its assistance programmes. Through the local committees,

[15] Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University, Ministry of Women's Affairs of the State of Palestine and UN-Women, "Building ties: towards integrated strategies and policies for empowering Palestinian women", 2013.

[16] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "International Women's Day 2017".

WFP and civil society partners ensured that women took a lead role in the management of food distribution and cross-checking of beneficiaries.

45. On 27 September 2017, UN-Women, in close collaboration with the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process, organized an open day on women and peace and security in the State of Palestine, which included the participation of the Special Coordinator, senior United Nations and European Union officials, women's rights and human rights organizations, political leaders and international organizations. During the open day, the participants drew attention to a range of pressing concerns and priorities, including the rights of women refugees, the impact of settlements, the socioeconomic situation of women and girls in Gaza and Jerusalem and the situation and rights of women imprisoned by Israel. Under the theme of the open day, women's participation in the reconciliation process was stressed, as was the commitment of the United Nations to prioritizing the women and peace and security agenda in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

F. Institutional development

46. The promotion of peaceful, just and inclusive societies, as enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal 16, cannot be achieved without gender-responsive policies and actions. Inclusive institutional development is an essential component of preventing conflict and sustaining peace and should promote women's ability to lead and participate in all aspects of development, humanitarian and peace and security efforts.

47. United Nations entities implemented a range of initiatives to promote women's meaningful leadership and participation within long-term institutional reform efforts. For example, UNESCO, together with the Minister of Labour, the Minister of Education and Higher Education and the European Union, launched the First Skills Forecasting Model, which provides quantitative projections on the supply of and demand for skills in the Palestinian labour market with a view to developing curricula, training programmes and employment policies. The model will offer essential insights to female students in choosing their educational path.

48. UNICEF and WFP jointly supported the Ministry of Social Development in the formulation of the Social Development Sector Strategy 2017–2022 to address the social and economic vulnerabilities of women and other groups. A key element of the Strategy is the introduction of a case management system in the West Bank that provides essential referrals based on clients' specific needs and vulnerabilities. ILO supported the establishment and training of 11 technical committees, including a gender committee, to produce policy papers supporting the adoption of reformed labour legislation. In July 2017, ILO and the Ministry of Labour signed an implementation agreement to support the establishment of the Palestinian Social Security Corporation, an independent institution that will enable the roll-out of the first social security system to cover private sector workers and their families in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

49. UNICEF provided technical and financial support for the development of a child protection information management system, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development and partners, which was transferred to the Ministry of Social Development in February 2017 and is used by service providers to document and follow up on cases. UN-Women supported the Ministry of Women's Affairs in reviewing the Cross-Sectoral National Gender Strategy 2014–2016 and in developing the strategy for 2017–2022. The process was focused on localizing the Sustainable

Development Goals within the strategy for long-term, transformative reform. In addition, UN-Women supported the Ministry of Women's Affairs in incorporating gender equality priorities into 12 sectoral strategies, namely with respect to education, health, culture, economic affairs, labour, agriculture, social development, water, housing, justice, security and local government.

50. OHCHR provided technical assistance to the Palestinian Authority, the Independent Commission for Human Rights and civil society in the West Bank and Gaza, including targeted assistance in the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which the State of Palestine acceded in 2014. OHCHR, in collaboration with UN-Women, worked closely with all stakeholders to prepare the initial State party report of the State of Palestine on the implementation of the Convention. The report was submitted to OHCHR on 8 March 2017 and will be considered by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2018.

51. In February 2017, UN-Women held a regional exchange workshop in Amman to enhance the knowledge and advocacy skills of civil society organizations regarding the Convention to protect women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa region and to improve the technical capacity of government entities with regard to the rules of procedure of the Committee. Approximately 50 participants attended the workshop, representing 20 Palestinian non-governmental organizations from the West Bank and Gaza, as well as government entities. In preparation for the consideration of the report of the State of Palestine by the Committee, UN-Women, with support from OHCHR, organized a mock session for government representatives and the Independent Commission for Human Rights.

52. A number of initiatives supported by UN-Women, ESCWA and others were aimed at building institutional support and capacity for the implementation of commitments on women and peace and security, including the national action plan on women and peace and security for the State of Palestine for the period 2017–2019. For example, during the reporting period UN-Women organized a regional knowledge exchange between the State of Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia on the planning, monitoring and evaluation of national action plans on women and peace and security, which benefited 30 participants. This contributed to enhanced regional networking and partnerships with respect to data collection and advocacy.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

53. Palestinian lives and livelihoods and the enjoyment of human rights by Palestinians continue to be seriously affected by more than 50 years of the military occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel, including a 10-year closure of the Gaza Strip, as well as by the Palestinian political divide. Women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected by unstable political circumstances that systemically create gender-based vulnerabilities. They also experience multiple forms of violence, based on the continuing military occupation, human rights violations and a growing humanitarian crisis, compounded by conservative traditions and patriarchal norms. Limited access for women to employment opportunities and sustainable financial income, an overwhelming share of care responsibilities, and the marginalization imposed owing to geographical fragmentation and the related restriction of movement, exacerbate women's vulnerability to violence and limit their opportunities to access protection, justice and security services.

54. The accession of the State of Palestine to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is an important step towards greater recognition of the human rights of women. It is commendable that the State of Palestine submitted its initial report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The report is scheduled to be considered by the Committee at its seventieth session, to be held in July 2018. Relevant Palestinian authorities and the Government of Israel have a critical role to play in eliminating discrimination against women and upholding women's human rights, ensuring accountability, respect for the rule of law and women's full, equal and meaningful participation in governance processes. The State of Palestine is encouraged to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention as an accountability tool under international human rights law. There is an increased need for the availability of both quantitative and qualitative data and analysis on the situation of Palestinian women,[17] the gender-specific impact of the occupation and the lack of progress in finding just and enduring peace. However, data disaggregated by sex and age, as well as gender analysis more broadly, have not yet been sufficiently utilized to inform related reporting and briefings on the situation of Palestinian people to other intergovernmental bodies, including the Security Council. In addition, options for facilitating direct inputs from women's civil society organizations to discussions on related themes should be considered.

55. Increased efforts are needed to improve women's economic empowerment. There is a need to focus on the interlinkages between the supply and demand sides of the labour market. This requires the design of practical interventions that promote the demand for women's labour while continuing to address the institutional and market impediments facing women's participation in the labour market. Women are entering the labour force in increasing numbers, but face numerous barriers notwithstanding their advanced education. An important starting point would be to challenge cultural stereotypes according to which women work only in certain fields or are better off working at home, and to identify women's real needs when they seek to enter the workforce and find stable employment. Robust social policies that support those needs, such as childcare, flexible working hours, policies that support work/life balance, and public awareness campaigns in support of working women, are essential.[18] National institutions should also address the lack of affirmative policies that promote the hiring of women. Labour laws and regulations should address existing gaps with respect to women's right to work and rights at work to promote gender equality in all sectors of the workforce.

56. National institutions should be supported in adopting holistic approaches to education, health and social services. Enhancing education quality and relevance can be achieved through the adoption of a more proactive approach to gender mainstreaming and inclusive and transformative education. Giving priority to women's health can be achieved through a public health perspective that is not limited to maternal and child health but also addresses Palestinian women's health needs regardless of their age and marital status.

57. Building an accurate understanding of the patterns and drivers of gender-based violence cannot be isolated from the impact of the overall political, humanitarian and economic context created by the prolonged occupation and other political realities in terms of increasing the risk and vulnerability for gender-based violence. While global

[17] These data have been included in the annual reports of the Secretary-General on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women since the 1980s.

[18] ILO, *The Occupied Palestinian Territory: An Employment Diagnostic Study* (forthcoming).

standards for addressing gender-based violence emphasize the need for effective national systems that guarantee security, justice and protection for women, Palestinian women are denied those guarantees in the Gaza Strip and in parts of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The Israeli occupation has severely limited the possibility of advancing protection through legal frameworks for addressing gender-based violence. The fragmentation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the closure imposed on Gaza have caused services, capacity and expertise to be made available only in certain areas. United Nations entities need to continue to work to strengthen services for survivors of gender-based violence and to address gaps in the quality, accessibility and sustainability of services. All actors should place greater focus on income generation for survivors of violence and on the provision of independent housing in which women survivors and their children may live free of abuse. The United Nations system should also support the institutionalization of violence prevention and response, particularly in areas most affected by conflict.

58. The United Nations humanitarian country team should continue to build on the foundation for a strengthened gender focus (in analytical, programmatic and institutional terms) in humanitarian action in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to ensure the capacity to identify and respond to priority gender needs in the humanitarian response. Humanitarian actors should continue to ensure a shift in humanitarian approaches and mechanisms to guarantee effective protection and access to assistance for women and girls in humanitarian crises, including the full and meaningful participation and leadership of women in all stages of humanitarian action, as well as adequate funding for gender-sensitive response.

59. The promotion of gender equality, and the empowerment of women and their human rights, remain essential to efforts for the realization of just and durable peace and sustainable development in the Middle East. A strong normative framework is in place at the global level on women and peace and security, with regional and national policies and action plans providing additional guidance on its operationalization. Continued efforts should be made by the Palestinian Authority and all other actors to fulfil commitments relating to women and peace and security and to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, leaving no one behind.